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ABSTRACT

The material in this monograph is part of the study materials for the one-semester distance education unit, Non-Formal Learning, in the Open Campus Program at Deakin University (Australia). It is designed to raise issues relating to skill definition. "Choosing a Worker or How Good Are Your Job Descriptions?" explores why interpersonal or communication skills are not counted or mentioned in job descriptions, the practical reasons that they need to be both counted and labeled, and explanations for why they are not. "Who Defines Skills and How?" addresses gender assumptions and gender biases inherent to some "skills," problems in the establishment of skill gradings and levels of competency in personal care, research responses to skills definition, and managing changing workplaces. "Putting Tacit Skills into the Picture" gives examples of ways in which the preceding information can be used in recognizing skills. It covers naming skills used in the workplace and ensuring that supervisors/managers have the necessary information on workers. "Trying It Out" presents various means to help people assess both their own skills and the ways in which jobs could be and should be described. Contains six references and an eight-item bibliography. (YLB)

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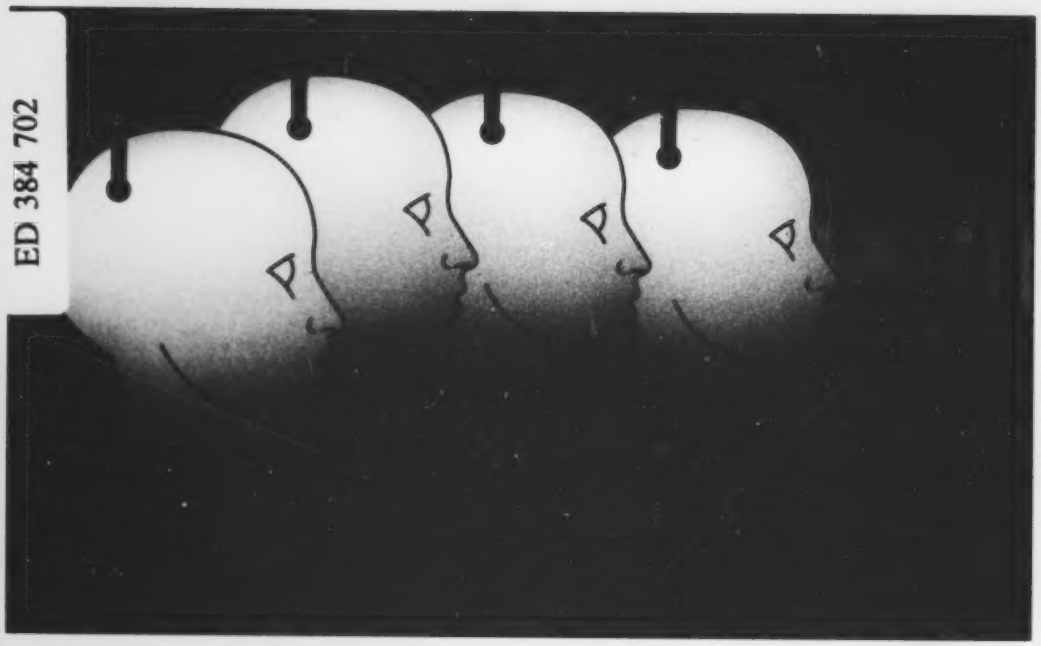

RECOGNISING WOMEN'S SKILL

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EVA COX AND HELEN LEONARD

EAE647 NON-FORMAL LEARNING

RECOGNISING WOMEN'S SKILL

EVA COX AND HELEN LEONARD

Deakin University

This book has been produced as part of the study materials for EAE647 *Non-Formal Learning*, which is one of the units offered by the Faculty of Education in Deakin University's Open Campus Program. It has been prepared for the unit team, whose members are:
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The study materials include:
E. Cox & H. Leonard, *Recognising Women's Skill**
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SERIES INTRODUCTION

The nature and purpose of education in the workplace has been the subject of much debate in Australia in recent years. While the vagaries of local and international competition have led many firms to reconsider the role of their workforce and the training requirements this entails, governments have been equally keen to adapt existing education systems to the perceived needs of industry. Leading union bodies have been distinguished in this debate by their pro-active role, outlining the path by which a reconstructed industrial climate can win the nation a new place in the world economy.

The study materials of which this volume is a part explore the approaches to learning currently modelled within industry. In the process the question inevitably arises as to whether existing orientations and practices are in the best interests of the various stakeholders in the workplace.

The arguments developed in these volumes address themselves to a range of contemporary issues in industrial education. To date, prevailing approaches have rested upon narrow, instrumentalist notions of learning; in their different ways, the writers have set out to challenge this orthodoxy. In doing so, they highlight the silences—on questions of gender, class or ethnicity—that underpin the behaviourist outlook still dominant in the world of training.

In preparing these study materials, the course team has sought to address issues that are of fundamental concern to those involved in the complex and demanding field of workplace learning. It is hoped that, in its own modest way, the pedagogy we have developed can serve to exemplify a different notion of what industrial education might become.

CHOOSING A WORKER OR HOW GOOD ARE YOUR JOB DESCRIPTIONS?

Scenario one

You have just finished an urgent report that your boss is waiting to see first thing in the morning. As well as pages of data, it contains complex sections of rationale and explanation of recommendations you would like to have accepted for action.

You have to choose the person to word process your report before the end of the day.

- **Person A** has speeds of 80 words per minute.
- **Person B** is marginally slower, but comes and tells you that a verb is missing in your second sentence and fixes your punctuation and spelling.
    - Which person do you choose to do your report?
    - Why?
    - Name the skills that make the difference.

Scenario two

You use your car to drive to and from work, as well as to get to meetings every day. It has just started making some very expensive sounding noises and has dramatically lost power. You have to choose a mechanic to fix your car and get it back on the road quickly. Your choice is between:

- **Person A** who will take off the head and replace the rings.
- **Person B** who will ring you with the head off to tell you it's not only the rings, before he puts it back would you like him to do ..... as well?
    - Who would you choose to fix your car?
    - Why?
    - Name the skills that make the difference.

Scenario three

Who would you choose for the reception/telephone job?

- Person A who has completed a telephone training course and is fresh from school?
- Person B who has spent time working for the local community information and referral service and as a lifeline volunteer?

In almost all cases, when these examples are used in workshops, the people chosen are not the ones with the job-specific skills, so probably those reading this will also choose person B in the three scenarios above. This means that we all often select someone because their interpersonal and organisational skills are more important than the actual skill in keyboard, car repairs or phone answering.

So why do we choose and use people to do jobs for a range of skills which are not those most often specified in their job description? The skills may be generally subsumed under *interpersonal* or *communication* or they may not even be mentioned. Many of these are skills that are necessary. This paper explores why such skills are not counted, the practical reasons that they need to be both counted and labelled, and explanations for why they are not.

Introduction

The material in this section was drawn from a variety of sources. Much of the research and the quotes came from a project undertaken by Distaff Associates for the Women's Research into Employment Initiatives Program administered by the federal Department of Employment Education and Training[1]. This along with other material developed by Distaff Associates has been used in a variety of workshop and training settings.

The objectives of the research and most of the training processes were to offer women participants a means of acknowledging and owning the skills they had, both those acquired in informal and formal settings. This was applied in groups to the development of what we called *personal skill audits*, a form of preparation for writing job applications. The process of recognising and naming skills also had a major influence on participants' self-confidence and so gave them a boost in self-esteem.

1 WREIP is a funding program for innovative research into women's employment.

The other part of the equation is, however, the ability of others to accept these skills and take them into account. It is not enough to have the owners of the skills able to articulate these, the audience for them must also be convinced, and this may take more than a confident delivery. In fact, this requires some major structural shifts in both managers' (employers') attitudes and within the industrial relations system.

Until 1994, the centralised wage-fixing system involved an award setting system where rates of pay were tied to a complex set of relativities. These mixed traditional hierarchies, based on industrial assessments of skills and training, with issues of experience and formal management of other staff. In theory, the introduction and extension of enterprise bargaining could lead to a system where market demand for certain skills is the primary wage setting principle. This is unlikely as the current values and valuing of skills, the nature of the industrial bargaining units and the gender of the participants will affect the outcomes.

Therefore change will only come if the following conditions are met:

- there is a broad recognition that the current definitions of skill are inadequate and gendered;
- those working in the areas of industrial relations, job design and training are given a broad understanding of the current limits and problems of skills and competency definitions; and
- there is further work done on ways of redefining jobs and establishing levels of competence in many of the areas of tacit skills discussed in this monograph.

The material in this document has been designed to be used in a variety of ways. Therefore, the obvious first step is to read the main text and measure the material both against your own experience and then against other readings in related course work.

Defining the problem

The current discussion of competencies by the Mayer Committee[2], and work being done on Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)[3] in various settings provides some openings for exploration of these areas. The danger is that in moves to

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2 Mayer Committee is responsible for implementing national competency standards.

3 Recognition of Prior Learning is being explored in TAFE to establish means of recognising informal learning and experience for course entry purposes.

accelerate the process of change the old wine will just be put in new bottles, and the new labels will cover the possibility that present limited skill definitions have passed their use-by date.

The exploration of new ideas and the development of new paradigms depends in part on the power of these ideas to make some sense to the recipient. At any time, there are many ideas in circulation: some will come from the dominant paradigms and carry the weight of being legitimated by their incorporation into the current system; others will try and contest these, offering alternatives.

These ideas are rarely original or new. They build on gaps and limitations of the current ideas, either extending these or offering alternative frameworks. The past two decades have seen many critiques of disciplines in the name of feminism. These have often required a major shift from the limited views that failed to notice or acknowledge the value of women's contributions.

Siting the differences

The industrial relations area has had some attention from feminist critics, especially in the area of equal pay. Recently, there has been some examination of the possible differences in attributes brought to paid workplaces by women. This takes a somewhat different tack in siting the differences as between household-based, informal learning and that acquired through credentialled, often trade type training.

From these different sourcings of skills (trade-based and learned) versus presumed natural (socialisation or genetic) a difference has arisen which affects the basis of assumptions of value. The areas where men had control and expertise have tended to be labelled in detail, evaluated, valued and set in hierarchies attracting both training and reward. The areas where women are the majority tend to be amorphously broad-based, have many skills unlabelled or under labelled and are often low status and low paid areas.

One of the most difficult areas in industrial relations is the changing of established patterns of recognition of skills, of pay hierarchies and relativities. The interest in this is not just academic. More appropriate definitions of relevant skills are a prerequisite to more effective use of resources. These have consequences in work value and wage negotiation.

Old models

Many of the models used for evaluating jobs derive from systems which were based on assembly line models. Jobs were considered to be related to the

manual or production processes where tasks tended to be individual and repetitive. When this is translated into non assembly line processes the initial framework is often overlaid with 'other' aspects relating to autonomy and to levels of supervision of other staff, or conceptual skill levels of intellectual work. So the skills ratings tend to relate still to the individual worker and what are deemed to be his [sic] tasks.

In the post-industrial society where services are more likely to employ people than manufacturing, the type of workplace relationships which served the industrial revolution were found to be inappropriate. Now the concept of work teams as smaller overlapping groupings is seen as more appropriate. These are closer to households, in the broader old-fashioned sense, than assembly lines. Therefore there is a need to develop strategies and techniques for naming and rewarding these tacit skills.

Their genesis is in the community, family and home: they predate the industrial revolution when paid work and home life were clearly separated. The post-industrial workplace again reproduces many of the aspects of the household production models which were lost in mass production assembly lines. Smaller workgroups, multi-skilling and more services is a long way from the Taylorist models of factory life.

It is noticeable that job descriptions omit all mentions of interactions with people until management level is reached. This assumption that interpersonal skills are only to be seen as valuable when they relate to the use of hierarchically designed power, runs quite counter to moves in the workplace towards work groups and communication on a level plane.

Rhetoric versus recognition

The moves in award restructuring have brought into the language of job redesigns much of the language of community and household groupings. Now the ability to work with others, to be part of teams, to take responsibility for parts of what is seen as a whole, are supposedly valued. Yet the language of job reclassification has been slow to catch up.

While it recognises multi-skilling as necessary, it ignores the concomitant communication processes this will generate. If each job is not separate, then negotiation and cooperation with others with overlapping roles is necessary. Secondly, if there are more tasks to do, there is a need to order and prioritise within the workload as well as across groups.

So flattening structures and creating flexibility in the workplace carries with it work practises relating to skills that are developed in family and community structures. These skills have been integral components of work

where women predominate but are often unrecognised and certainly undervalued. If these are not recognised and adjustments made, the probability is that the productivity of work units will not necessarily increase. Unless the process skills within are valued, and staff selected on the basis of their intrinsic importance, the new structures are likely to fail.

Management courses are beginning to recognise that people are the core, not machines, and that people skills and strategic planning are essential. Yet the language of planning comes from the military and a workplace is assumed to resemble an army. This raises questions of appropriate models: there are fewer generals than housewives, workplaces are getting smaller and the ability to juggle time and resources is practiced more often at home than in the army.

'Household' skills dilemma

Many 'household' skills are relevant to areas opening up under communication technology, but they cannot easily be transferred into workplace terms. Yet they are being used daily in the workplace, and their usage will increase as technology allows increasing complexity of tasks to be performed simultaneously, with interpersonal skills being needed to organise the workloads.

Those workers who have outstanding skills in creating group cohesion, of making workplaces work, of creating the environment in which productivity rises, are likely to be overlooked.

Flawed assumptions

There is a strong possibility that the basic assumptions underpinning the valuing of workplace skills are sufficiently flawed that the best intentions of the present process could result in two unwanted outcomes:

1. further disadvantages for feminised occupations as their skill base is undervalued and misrecorded; and
2. the inhibiting of effective recognition of the skills needed in the overall workforce to deal with major changes in workplace requirements.

The need to tackle these problems is not just an equity issue but an efficiency one, as failure to expand our recognition of the skill base of all workers can only lead to inefficient use of resources. The only analysis that adequately explains the problem is that the governments/ political parties/ unions/ employers and others that comprise the male-dominated institutions, are all uncomfortable with the reduction of the barriers between publicly validated credentials and private informal learning.

WHO DEFINES SKILLS AND HOW?

Gender assumptions

Basic bias

The term 'skill' cannot be assumed to be understood and its meaning accepted without significant gender biases. The language of skills, abilities and learning is not gender-neutral, but sufficiently gender-biased and variant to affect significantly the whole area of skill definitions and skill development.

There are areas of activities which are often seen as female: communication, interpersonal relationships, ability to do many things at one time, to do emotional and physical caring and even the work of organising and producing material without machines. These are not understood as 'skills' by women or men. Where women do it well they call it 'natural', where they enjoy it they call it a 'gift' or 'talent', but as it is not seen as learned it is therefore not 'skilled'.

Under-recognition by women

Women who bring these skills into the workplace are not advocates of their own areas of expertise. This is, in part, a consequence of women's need to be accepted in the paid workplace on male terms. It is possible that in the process of trying to avoid handmaiden roles in the workplace, women sold themselves short by denigrating tasks which relate to service and relationships.

Women were only allowed to access paid workforce roles through male paradigms and this excluded those tasks which could be seen as parallel to household duties. In that process maybe women inadvertently became complicit in undervaluing skills which were increasingly relevant to a changing workforce. New requirements validated the importance of these skills, but failed to recognise them unless they came from accredited training, not informal sectors. If men downvalued or ignored these skills so did women.

The unpaid/non work/household/unskilled syndrome

Value attribution

A person works over forty hours a week in crisis management and people management and organises the finances of a national environment network. If the person is an executive in a government department dealing with social services who has management and finance experience, this person would be considered as highly skilled and a valuable member of the workforce.

But if this person is a housewife bringing up children, caring for her mother and who works for a Greens group after serving dinner, she will see things differently and public perceptions would also discount her skills.

For many women time out of the paid workforce is described on paper as *'doing nothing'* or *'just being a housewife'*. Yet the range of skills required to run a household and carry out community work are often the same as those used in the paid workforce.

Hidden skills

The 1988 Time Use Survey conducted by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS)[4] showed that each hour of paid work is matched by an hour of unpaid work—carried out by women. Most of this is housework. Ignoring the scope of the skills which make up the unpaid workforce leads to a massive understatement of Australia's skill base, according to the report. Employers sell themselves short by failing to probe for the 'hidden skills' which so many women offer, by evaluating competence according to paid work experience and training courses undertaken.

Paid work and unpaid work are gendered in that women tend to be taught household skills and men are often exempted from an early age. Little boys are taught to promote themselves and be aggressive, and little girls to care and manage emotions and clean up. These stereotypes move on through life and reproduce themselves constantly in apparent paid and unpaid work divisions, without recognising that both sets of skills are necessary and desirable in both spheres.

So we need to look seriously at the way that households and communities are managed, primarily by women. This involves a range of skills which are not just those involved in the tasks, but relate to the management of relationships,

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4 This was a pilot survey of time use in Sydney in 1987 by the Australian Bureau of Statistics.

and through these to achieve certain quality of life objectives. In the *layering* of the multiple responsibilities for others, skills are developed at various competency levels which allow for the complexity of life processes.

The public/private split

When the industrial revolution started, it created a division between public and private. It moved paid work into factories and out of the house, and left households with the residual responsibilities which were the continuation of the community.

On the other side, the household has got smaller and more socially dysfunctional as the size of families, the structure of cities and the location of workplaces has changed. The present household arrangements are very badly designed for living and in particular, for using as a base for moving into paid work.

This does not mean the household is a form of workplace which is admirable or should be used as a model for other activities. The modern urban household is neither an effective or efficient provider of care from an adult, and most probably a child's, viewpoint. Where once child rearing/ care was a joint family responsibility and families/ clan/ community worked and lived communally, we now separate the roles.

We isolated child rearing as it became less frequent and physically demanding. We found that psychological pressures were built into the equation to continue the control. This benefits men whose lives become more comfortable through domestic services, provided by women in the home.

Melding of spheres

The need for personal care services for children, the frail aged and others is now moving into the public arena. Here it is more likely to be offered in groups, where it will not reproduce the isolation of household life and will limit the solo aspects of duties. This suggests the private and public are being melded in ways which both recognise our needs for privacy and also the limits on the household as a workplace for many hours a day.

Who set the a-gender?

Who defined the paid workplace as the real world, the important one which had to be supported by the household? How is it that the objective for living appears to be the paid workplace and the economy? How did these get to be so

important? How did the relatively structured and organised workplace come to be seen as more demanding than the chaos of home settings? Who sets the criteria and on whose behalf? In these questions is the answer to the present industrial relations chasm.

Think back to the gender divisions of hunter–gatherers. The gatherers provided the great bulk of the food, but hunting was more prestigious. In many cultures the rituals of hunting are the public face of power but the collectors of food and water are overlooked. The hunters also did less work than the women, and sat waiting for their services.

Household non work

Women used to stay at home, or at least to be available to take primary responsibility for the management of relationships and the attendant care and housekeeping duties that this sector involves. Many men take the option of making the paid work role their priority, which may be the easier option if alternatives are carefully considered. The following illustrates a not uncommon division of labour in many two income households:

> He leaves home at 7.00 a.m. because he has work to do. She is left with dressing two small children, putting the clothes in the washer, pulling the dinner makings from the freezer. She also has to find bunny ears for today's mad hatters tea party and a rush batch of anzac biscuits for the bring-a-plate function to raise day care funds. At 9.20 a.m., late again, she slips behind her desk to the soothing sight of an overfull in tray and only two people talking, none crying or putting cereal on her skirt.
>
> At 5.00 p.m. she reverses the process, leaving early to pick up the drycleaning, dropping the chemist prescription to his mother, and picking up some chops for the weekend birthday barbie. She cooks tea, feeds the children, hangs out the washing, deals with a brawl on the ice cream flavour, sorts out a clean shirt and irons his, hers and the children's clothing. He comes home and offers to bathe the children while she organises some material for work tomorrow.
>
> And she says thank you because he has worked so hard it is nearly 8.00 p.m. before he makes it home, so she feels guilty about being able to leave at 5.00 p.m. ...

However if you look at comparative skills used within the family setting, and the difficulties involved, her role is often the most demanding and the least recognised. This difference is reproduced again and again.

What counts?

The wellbeing of a community rests on both the publicly acknowledged paid work and the unpaid work which is performed in the home and in the community. Paid work is seen as part of the economy, as a sector of gross domestic product and a major resource to be developed and valued. On the other hand unpaid work is often overlooked and always undervalued.

As the bulk of unpaid work in developed countries is housework and therefore the de facto responsibility of women, its invisibility is part of gendered value systems developed from male viewpoints. This is being slowly redressed as women in decision-making and lobbying roles succeed in putting unpaid work on the political agenda.

Measuring household work

Juggling Time[5] (Bittman 1991) estimates that approximately each hour of paid work is matched by an hour of unpaid work. Most of this is housework, but about 3% is contributed in community work (p. 33). This means that half or more of our worktime is spent in unpaid tasks.

The distribution of this work between men and women shows imbalances: 70% of household work is done by women, with men taking on more outdoor and travel tasks, leaving the sector as gender segregated as the public labour market. The women's tasks relate more to people needs, with more direct time on child care, and, presumably, more indirect time on secondary care, as women are in the house with the children.

Implications

The scope of the tasks which constitute the unpaid sector suggests that it is imperative the skills these tasks develop and require in the estimates of the Australian skill base. The lack of worth assigned to unpaid work and the gendered nature of much of it, means that recording, assessing and valuing these skills has rarely occurred. The priority for the future must be to develop means of naming and assessing these areas of skill.

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5 The 1991 report of the ABS Time Use Survey previously mentioned

Care work

The current economic revolution is in the quaternary sector of personal services: this is dependent on these skills, and shows that people can serve others, while working cooperatively in groups. The fact that less than 12% of employment is now in manufacturing and 23% is in community and health services suggests that the skills base recognition needs an overhaul.

This is an increasing category of paid work and mainly replaces the care in households. It is often demanding and is offered at a wide range of skills which we are all aware of, but do not put value on. Those who are good with children may well receive social approbation, and those who offer care through foster care programs are seen as performing socially useful roles. However, the establishment of skill gradings and levels of competency in personal care has presented many problems.

Relationship

The first is in the nature of the tasks. The provision of care services to another person requires a somewhat different approach from other work processes. For a start, in most cases it requires the establishment of a relationship with the person. It also recognises that the relationship affects the quality of the service. This operates in micro ways even in sales work, where good customer relations are seen as important. In personal services the intensity and ongoing nature of the relationship can be a major part of service delivery.

Time and 'efficiency'

Time is now appearing in the sociological literature. Karen Davies (1990) described the difference that relatedness makes to the completion of tasks. The linear time frame, best illustrated in assembly lines, does not work in people-related tasks.

We have used an example of personal care and washing of the frail aged: workers do not hang their clients upside down and hose them down even if it is more efficient than present modes. This is because the skills include the recognition of relationship and human dignity.

Therefore the issue is whether the types of relationships we need in service industries are those used in households and underrated. It must also be recognised that the time needed for such tasks and the limits set by the relationships often make these tasks hard to assess as tasks alone, as the other

aspects, such as conversation while caring, extend and enhance the quality of care, while delaying completion. This then requires another set of evaluation tools that measure various dimensions of task completion, including satisfaction of client.

Job advertisements for a 'mature' person often obfuscate what is wanted: an effective office housewife able to deal with complex tasks while doing the emotional housework. But these skills are never defined as they are seen as *attributes* rather than *skills*. This is again an under-researched and defined area of skill and competency recognition.

Research responses to skills definition

> "Why do you find it difficult to say what your skills are?"
>
> "If we had a name, a grouping we could put on ourselves like 'a lawyer'... but we can't say that ... we can only say I worked in a playgroup ... I think this is the hesitation."

These are quotes from a project looking at the nearly invisible sector of Australian skill development (Cox & Leonard 1991). Originally we saw it as an exercise in matching unpaid community work skills with those in the paid workforce and the report *From Ummm ... to Aha!* covers the findings in that area. However, other issues emerged during the research, suggesting that the original project needed to be expanded to cover a sector of more complex skills which are presently unlabelled

These are the skills which manage small and diverse units effectively. The move from household production into mass workplaces in the industrial economy of the early twentieth century tended to overshadow small employment units which function more like households. The job evaluation literature which developed from these assembly lines up, made assumptions which do not hold in post-Fordist workplaces which are part of present job redesign and award restructuring.

Changing frameworks

Changed frameworks are essential for developing a clever country and a fairer one. The moves to multi-skill, to small contained workgroups and away from Tayloristic work styles means that small unit skills are again becoming visible

and necessary. An office where tasks are no longer separately assigned to 'typist', 'filing clerk' and 'tea lady', needs to work as a unit and requires skills which are often developed in family and community settings. In the technodriven skill analyses which presently hold sway, however, they are not labelled.

Obviously the limited process of group discussions undertaken in the research is not going to allow for a redefinition of a complex area of interlinked job and pay rates. But what it does offer is a sufficient jarring of the present analyses to suggest that there are exciting possibilities in looking at alternative definitions. It builds on some of the management rhetoric about the primacy of people not machinery, which can be seen as post-industrial commonsense, and uses a feminist reframe[6] to move the debates.

Gender differentiation

What emerged from the above process was the fact that many of the skills women had were un-named and unrecognised both in the workplace and at home. Many of the paid areas in which women work have tended to be unrecognised multi-skilled areas such as clerical work and community services. Whereas men's occupations have often been over-classified, women's have tended to be under-analysed for differing skills. This has positive implications in redressing the gender bias which assumes that paid work and formal training are the almost exclusive sources of skill and experience.

If the word 'skill' is as gendered in its use and application as our material suggests, there are problems in using it to cover workplace skills for women. If there are also poorly differentiated skills used in the workplace which are not valued or defined because they derive from household bases, the valuing of work will be seriously flawed.

Barriers to recognition

> "When a man walked in, he felt more comfortable naming what he can do than any woman. Why?"
>
> "That's because he's done things."
>
> "But you've done things."
>
> "But not the sort of things that other people haven't done ..."

6 This is a reconceptualisation of current industrial relations assumptions of skill recognition based on a feminist perspective.

It became clear that asking women to record their skills as such would not work to produce outcomes comparable to a similar process with males. Therefore a more complex process of triggering responses has been shown to be necessary. We have started using a process in groups and in individual sessions which requires a considerable degree of interaction to establish the necessary shift to an expanded framework. However, the problem with the issues of language and conceptual differences in the construction of skill analysis remains. The research we have done indicates that there are likely to be substantial levels of under-reporting of women's skills because of female non recognition of the word.

In addition, there are further problems in redefining the skills so they include more of those derived from family service type experiences. The more one examines job classification systems the more it becomes obvious that they are devised with assembly line production as a basic paradigm. They are therefore dated as well as sexist, as workplace interrelationships are now more complex.

Moreover, the changing nature of male workplaces is also being ignored. The move towards workgroups and devolution of tasks which has long been the hallmark of some of the more innovative and effective production systems in Japan and Sweden means fewer management layers and more diversity of tasks per person. Therefore the ability to communicate and cooperate are essential to effective workgroup functioning.

Families, households and communities have long provided the models for small group interaction. While recognising the problems which might occur in these settings, we cannot ignore the socialisation and models these provide for workplaces. The development of good workplace relations may depend as much on transferred household skills as on learned technical ones.

The moves in offices away from specialist to generalist tasks, with keyboard integration and the use of technical equipment to provide filing, copying and other repetitive functions means that the development of good working relations are intrinsic to functioning. It is no longer possible just to get on with one's job as multi-skilling and tasks create interdependence.

The nothing complex

> "I rang a refuge about a job, I'm not qualified or anything, and I told them I didn't have any qualification. And they asked whether I had brought up kids and I said yeah, so they said, you've got qualifications!"
>
> "It's really hard to think about it ... because you think of skills being professional skills."

> "Learning to ride a bike is a skill you learn, but giving your emotions ... looking after other people's children is something you just have or don't have."

The quotes come from groups we ran discussing the most obvious area of lack of recognition: the unpaid work that women do in the community. The advantage was that this did not cut across work being done in the paid workforce, but still allowed the exploration of the skills base and its 'naming'. Women have proved particularly reticent in acknowledging their unpaid activities, let alone claiming credit for them.

The results of the study so far not only confirm the earlier identified problem that women have poor self-skill recognition but also that they do not recognise many of the areas in which women work as skilled. With only one exception, the responses from all groups have been to illustrate a series of cognitive barriers.

'Skill' is gendered

As outlined above the word 'skill' is gendered. By this we mean that it is seen by women to cover primarily those skills which are validated by formal training and certification. These tend to be seen as trades and tool related, and are therefore seen as male. Because they are technical and machine-related they are primarily identified as blue collar jobs.

There are areas which are seen as parallel to male skilled work, even though they are female. Many women acknowledged they have keyboard skills but again tend to see these as speed and machinery related, whilst ignoring the ancillary skills a good typist needs, such as commonsense, comprehension, good spelling, ability to organise work and make sense of poor manuscripts. This emerged time and time again in the groups as skills were immediately assumed to relate to qualifications and accreditation.

Formal versus informal

The basis for some of these beliefs extends to what is seen as *learned* and what is seen as *acquired* by other means. One of the problem areas is the apparent distinction, within Anglo communities at least, between something that is learned in a formal situation and accredited, and something that is just acquired, not learned.

The following interchange occurred at a recent skills workshop:

"Name your communication skills." – "Listening."
"Have you done a course on it?" – "Yes."
"And could you listen before you did the course? – "No."

This is also reflected in the way training and accreditation are seen as being in the workplace situation and training institutions. Those skills which are not the result of formal learning are not seen as skills. This obviously does not apply to apprenticeships which include a learning on-the-job component, but these again are primarily male.

Skill definitions

So the relationship between the maleness of skills and the difficulties that women find in making connections is based on real cultural and social sets of definitions. The volumes of skill definitions prepared by TAFE[7] for the recognition of overseas qualifications substantially detail trade skills but retreat to years and topics of study for professional areas.

This again validates the difference between male identified jobs and traditionally female ones. Those which consist mainly of interpersonal skills and do not have a scientific component tend to be female and undervalued and/or depend on formal credentials for validation, for example social workers.

Paid and unpaid work

The possibilities of recognising skills developed in unpaid work are doubly difficult. If on-the-job learning is generally devalued, it is even more difficult when the work is unpaid. There is a big division in people's minds between the value of paid and unpaid work.

The first proposition that paid and unpaid work used similar skills was firmly resisted by women in the groups but in contradictory ways. There was often a defiant claim that households and children required a high level of competence to manage. However, this was immediately vitiated by a rejection of the proposition that these experiences were useful in finding paid work. So

7 National Office Of Overseas Skill Recognition is Commonwealth funded to determine how overseas skills can be recognised.

a defence of the household sector as a training ground for 'doing anything', was immediately removed into a different mind set when defining paid work skills.

Skill acquisition in unpaid work

The recognition of unpaid work as a learning situation was difficult even where skill training was actually included. Volunteers trained in advice or counselling skills did not see these as skills because they were not being used in paid jobs. They were useful adjuncts to living but not applicable to paid work at later stages. Those areas which derive from life experience are assumed to be non-skilled and 'just natural' and enjoyed as 'a gift', whether practised in or out of paid work. Therefore the word 'skill' is itself not understood.

Across social indicators

There were surprisingly few differences amongst the women we listened to, with one fascinating exception. The issues of class and education had little effect on the basic conceptual divisions of skill and learning. Despite age, political and cultural difference, there were very similar deficiencies in perception of self and skills. This appears to hold also for senior women who have come to us for individual consultations and who also grossly understate their skills.

The exception—intergenerational transfer

The exception was the Aboriginal group whose world view saw everything as 'learned' and therefore as 'skilled'. The group had a very strong sense of the transmission of information and of intergenerational learning. This included personal interactions, communication and household skills, which suggests a genuine cultural divergency in perceptions of innate and learned attributes. The fact that the transmission of culture is oral obviously facilitated this view.

Men

Men were not the subject of this study, so our comments are limited to some incidental data collected in other contexts. These indicate that men see male/female differences similarly to women. Sociological literature abounds with definitions of male and female roles: men are seen as instrumental and women are seen as affective and emotional in a variety of authors from Durkheim and Talcott Parsons to some of the recent French feminist post-structuralist writers on difference.

Socialisation

Apart from the structural language problems, attention needs to be paid to the gender differences in the socialisation of males and females and the effects this has on this issue. As mentioned earlier, women had real difficulty in articulating their strengths and competencies. This was at least in part a result of their inability to talk about themselves. While a lack of self-esteem contributes to this, it also reflects a social construction which allows men to promote themselves, while women are expected to be modest and await recognition.

This dates back to childhood where the proscriptions that girls face are more likely to inhibit boasting and skiting as being totally unacceptable for girls. Women, therefore, are programmed not to recognise and name their skills as they are not expected to talk about them. This is a factor both in the differentiation of recognition of male and female skills and the silence on female skill areas. If women cannot talk about them, then there is no way they will be recognised.

This was confirmed again and again in our groups. Women repeatedly avoided talking about themselves. The silences, which usually act as a prompt for further discussion, became painful, yet remained unbroken so that the taboo on self-talk would not be broken. This inability of women to self-promote is a major contribution to the limited discourse on these areas.

Implications

The research we have done indicated two major problem areas: that women are likely to under-report substantially their skills because of female non-recognition of the word; and that the workforce skill base will be deficient because defined skills will omit many derived from female household experiences which are crucial to effective workplace functioning.

Managing changing workplaces

Some of this material has been used to examine the skills required in restructured workplaces. These changes require the ability to assess the needs of higher level staff, the capacities of other staff and the priorities of conflicting demands. There is no longer someone who types and someone else who files and someone else who photocopies, the one person probably does all on her desktop and answers phones as well.

This again raises an interesting issue: the skills women often use are those which make their appearance as management skills. For example, they feature strongly in the Public Service Senior Executive Service criteria, but do not appear explicitly in lower level positions. It is obvious that there are many upward and lateral management skills and strategic thinking skills that are used at lower levels but are neither labelled nor credentialled.

The ability to multi-task and prioritise, sort and deliver information; the creation of appropriate communication environments and the planning and delivery of work in cooperative working groups are all skills which are not specified for clerical assistants, but are for managers. Yet in the changing work environments where information and transmission of services are the basis of workplace activities, these and other skills are probably more central than technical or machine skills.

Skills and competencies

There is currently a move to establish a national set of competencies which are designed to provide a basis for assessing the new skills developed through schooling and TAFE. These were developed by the Carmichael Committee[8] and now are being examined and applied by the Mayer Committee

A serious problem

Without wanting to enter into the broad areas of concern and issues with the seven competencies, it is worth noting that the problems of basing competencies on exisiting skill definitions bring a similar critique to that area. The problem is the current assumption: that present skill and competency paradigms are adequate representations of skills either available or needed. This is not the case as skills and competencies validated in the Carmichael/Mayer process are biased towards those produced by the industrial accreditation processes.

The present workforce growth is in the areas of services, not goods. ABS figures indicate that more than 70% of employees are in service industries and over half the workforce are in small organisations. Yet the bulk of debate has

8 Carmichael Committee was involved in developing the national competency program.

been fitted to the Procrustean bed[9] frames of parameters established within industrial enterprises. These have been adapted to service areas but at the cost of using inappropriate starting points.

The broader employment area debates run the risk of losing the plot if the workforce is going to be in smaller units, less hierarchically organised, with more multi-skilling and a move away from 'Taylorised' task divisions. This sounds less like the factory of yesteryear, and more like the Japanese and Swedish workgroups we have heard about, and that is where some of the models have come from.

Entrenched underrating

Here lies the problem: the focus has been on the form and not the content. In attempting to reform the ineffective aspects of Australian productivity, the influence on productivity of relationship management and communication skills has been regarded as a second order problem. This is an outcome of the validation of skills processes which privileges formal, written and accredited skills over those developed in informal and oral settings.

The newer models of workplace groups have strong equivalence with communities and households: there is the need to manage from within the group, with a high level of organisation of complex tasks with overlapping roles. It requires lateral management, emotional housework, and levels of information seeking, transfer, needs recognition and other skills which also are most effective within a community linked group. In sociological terms the 'gesellschaft' must incorporate the competencies of 'gemeinschaft' into its framework.

The workplace relationships which are necessary to allow for high productivity and creativity, which validate risk taking and diversity as well as existing competencies, are never mentioned. The assumption is that these skills are somehow natural endowments, luck or by-products of other more measurable workplace functions.

The problem of underrating the above skills, or assuming they come packaged with credentials, is exacerbated when the directions of economic growth are examined. A service sector growth scenario suggests that the service product will fail to impress unless many of the above and other unrecognised skills are incorporated. There are few areas of service provision where the skills

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9 Procrustes in Cretan mythology was an inkeeper who offered a night's accommodation to passing travellers but either racked them to stretch their bodies or chopped off their feet so they fitted his bed.

of establishing appropriate client–provider relationships are not intrinsic and essential.

Future trends

Phil Ruthven, from IBIS, a trend measuring firm, points out that most of the consumer product manufacturing sector replaces household production: that fabrics, clothing, furniture, household goods etc. were once both produced and consumed at home. He predicts the potential area of growth is essentially the other household tasks which have not moved into industrial production. These are mainly services, such as care and the provision of value-added products like meals and ironed shirts.

This trend is already underway, with convenience foods and takeaways accounting for major expenditure growth and employment growth. Their success as adequate replacements for household services will be dependant not only on function, but also on the inherent relationship skills. Again this suggests that there has been both poor competency recognition if the skills in delivering such services have not been measured and included.

Dissecting communication

Communication is a case in point. Some of the skills listed for certain occupations include communication, but essentially within a functional framework: communication to achieve the actual production processes or to ascertain the clients' immediate needs. The development of more complex levels of communication, such as used in most interactions, rates little attention. There is no distinction made between the person who can find information, and the person who can find out needs for information from a client, and the way someone can put this together so the two quite separate skills marry.

Efforts are being made to fit the massive numbers of these implicit and sometimes semi-explicit skills into the competency framework, but this may cause further problems. We need to create a framework that develops its criteria from the complexities of living and services, not the relative simplicity of production.

The modernist assumptions about progress and public life only function because the complexities of the private sphere underpin them. The failure of many of the predictions of economic equations is a factor of their ignoring what was not visibly measurable, or part of their daily public life. Under this the complex, non-linear time and space of community and household allowed order to reign.

The complexities of service-based economies, of managing in a post-industrial era, suggest that the constraining baggage of industrialisation needs to be discarded with its machines. The key to opening up issues of competency is within the public/private split which saw politics, public life and paid work as defined within the experiences and ambitions of men, mainly bourgeois men. For them, an escape from the untidy pre-industrial production of households into the more efficient and ordered workplace was desirable and justifiable in the name of progress.

In the final decade of the millennium, this model of work and public life is being increasingly questioned. The split within many professional discourses between the technology driven advances and increased specialisation and the development of more people-oriented, holistic service approaches, is one manifestation of this.

The questioning of directions for development within environmental movements, within the north–south dialogue and the discourses on public and private relating to family responsibilities and paid work are all manifestations of this dialogue. Yet, the Mayer competency framework to date manages again to marginalise the central skills that both equity and efficiency demand be included.

Changing paradigms—reporting the research

Kuhn (1961) in his work on paradigm shift and other works such as Strauss (Glaser & Strauss 1967), allow for the basic ability of research to move from the confining limits of received wisdom. The present project has not broken totally new ground. As work by Burton (1991) indicates, gender biases have already been identified in the literature. However, our reading confirms that the work tends to be restricted to pushing the bounds of present systems, but not moving the parameters.

The research indicates that there are serious and basic problems with current definitions of skills. These derive both from gender biases in the workplace and from gender-related blindness to household sector skills. Given the changing nature of workplaces, we suggest that these combine to make present paradigms inadequate as a means of describing job requirements.

PUTTING TACIT SKILLS INTO THE PICTURE

Recognising skills

The following sections give examples of ways in which the material above can be used. The establishment of a *skill audit* form relies on task prompts which lead women to identifying skills through the task definitions, and then translating these into workplace terms. The results from use of the forms indicate that many women would ignore open questions but can deal with clear verbal prompts, which contain some form of confrontation, albeit brief.

Some examples of forms are included later.

From Umm ... to Aha!

The encouraging aspect of the findings is that once the wall is breached, the women make the conceptual switch to seeing these areas as skills. Their confidence increases and they start to build on their strengths.

This showed both in the groups and in a range of other settings where the process has been used. It works well with women at all levels, which confirms the findings that women share this problem across a range of skill levels. In particular, women with few paid work experiences are delighted to uncover their hidden skills and develop confidence in their ability to move into paid work.

The findings have also been used in train-the-trainers sessions. The framework can be used for defining and promoting skills developed through unpaid activities as legitimate factors for consideration in the development of competency-based assessments. Managers need to be aware that they will not get similar responses from males and females in job descriptions or skill audits.

Sensitising employers

These are ways in which to sensitise employers to the women's needs. This covers in-place employees as well as new entrants, as the material we analysed also suggested that the hidden skills of women in paid work were remaining hidden and could be subsumed within the same prescriptions. At the moment women's responses indicate that they second guess the employers as being even more judgmental and limited in their perception than they actually are. The project clearly showed that the real solution lies in assisting women to own their own skills both in and out of the paid workplace.

However, there is a need for further work to be done to point out to employers and supervisors that they may sell themselves short by failing to probe for 'hidden skills'. Their selection and employment processes would be enhanced by their more accurate skill assessments.

Raising the issues

The process of initiating the project has opened up many additional areas for research and community education.There is a need to look at skills which predominate in many feminised work areas which are not generally named and therefore often not assessed in work value cases. This range of omissions is likely to reinforce the differences in work value which accrue to these jobs rather than the more accredited technical jobs primarily held by men.

The present work value systems are generally developed from two main sources:

- The process work model which assumes that lowest level tasks are repetitive and manual and that increased complexity and authority add to work value. This is represented by systems essentially following the Hay model[10].
- The training/education accreditation model which assumes that the items formally learned are those which are to be assessed as evidence of skills.

There are alternative models which tend to assess other types of skills but still work by building on existing models. The following split is being used in some award restructuring processes to assess the relative levels of skills in each of these areas:

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10 Hay model was developed in the USA in the 1940s and structures skills on an assembly line model.

- manual skills requiring physical effort including dexterity, physical coordination, etc.;
- cognitive or mental skills; and
- interpersonal skills, including flexibility, diplomacy, negotiation, leadership etc.

Our experience suggests that the processes of logging the components of what are seen as low-skilled women's jobs are not likely to identify these skill areas. This is because:

- The women themselves do not name these as skills as they are derived from home-based learning, not part of accredited training programs.
- The socialisation of women inhibits their ability to record their skills effectively.
- Few of these skills will ever have been acknowledged in job descriptions as they are seen as female and therefore social rather than industrial.

Naming skills — some examples

For most of the paid workforce there are many skills which often go unrecognised as part of lower level occupations. There is an assumption that they become essential valued requirements for middle and senior managers. This ignores the fact that interpersonal management skills are often used at all levels, and in fact workers require most skills when they operate without concomitant authority.

The assumption that these are restricted to upper levels is a gendered assumption, which may originate in the necessity to specify these tasks for senior management which usually are male and not aware of these skills. The following list came from groups and training programs and have been acknowledged as being a necessary part of most workplace interactions and production. However, these are rarely mentioned in job descriptions and certainly not assumed to be skills worthy of pay rate recognition, which makes these possible under-recognised skills.

Process skills which make workplaces work

NB These are often specified as part of the skills needed by middle and senior managers.

Assess how often these are used by you in your workplace, and then assess how often they are used by the holder of the three lowest graded positions at your workplace.

- Mediation
  - negotiation
  - organising events
  - running formal meetings
  - running informal meetings
- Conflict resolution
  - formal
  - informal
  - invisible
- Operating networks
  - formal
  - informal
- Managing invisibly
  - up
  - sideways
- Implementing
  - planning
  - following up
  - allocating tasks
- Training
  - formal
  - on the job
  - informal
- Persuading
  - developing a case
  - creating agreement

- Creating ceremonies
  - recognising events
  - providing personal support
  - initiation
  - farewells
- Sorting priorities
  - time
  - resources
  - tasks
  - attention
- Developing systems
  - classifying
  - organising
  - documenting
  - communicating
- Information brokerage
  - what is needed
  - finding out information
  - offering it appropriately
- Setting priorities
  - sorting options
  - sorting tasks
  - ranking overlapping demands
- Creating a comfortable environment
  - physically
  - verbally
  - emotionally
- Group processes
  - mediation
  - negotiation
  - organising events
  - running formal meetings
  - running informal meetings
- Crisis management
  - fighting fires
  - creating calm

- Making a friendly ambience
  - welcoming people
  - seeing to needs
  - recognising significant events
  - providing personal support

Now check the job descriptions/ selection criteria for the various positions in which these are used and see if they are mentioned.

How important are they for:

- the effective performance of the job?
- the functioning of the organisation overall?
- the productivity levels?

These skills are the ones that make groups work, that allow workers and clients to interact and achieve what is needed. Yet they are often seen either as peripheral if desirable extras, or as unacknowledged necessary skills lumped under 'mature' or 'experience' qualifications.

These are rarely articulated at lower levels, and some are only included at upper echelons. There is a need to look more carefully at the skills that make workplaces work and include them in job evaluation processes and possibly explore their pay equity ramifications.

Look at the occupations which are still primarily female and develop what would be appropriate job descriptions. Here are some starting points:

- Clerical jobs involving interpersonal interactions
  - receptionist/switch
  - secretary
  - personal assistant
  - counter clerk
  - word processing supervisor
- Household-based jobs caring and cleaning involving people
  - nurse's aide
  - nanny
  - housecleaning
  - child-care assistant
  - dental assistant
  - food serving

- Sales jobs involving interactions
  - pharmacy assistant
  - bookshop
  - children's wear
  - papershop
  - food shop

Workplace material

One objective of developing more effective job descriptions is therefore to prepare material for use by employers for selection, or in the workplace for promotions, job redesign and career planning/training needs.

The following examples have been developed to indicate the types of material and format that could be included. As each organisation differs, these forms should be purpose built and reflect agreed priorities including those that may be relevant in the strategic and corporate planning processes.

Employers and supervisors

The following material is offered as a base line of information that supervisors/managers should use to ensure that they have the necessary information on each worker. It is important to keep written records which are carefully compiled taking into account EEO principles. This means making sure that the information on each person is a true reflection of their skills and allows for the varied reactions one might achieve through verbal interchanges.

Research shows that many women are not good at outlining their skills and tend to be more reticent in self-reporting than men. Certain cultural mores also inhibit groups such as Aborigines from being seen to self promote. A good supervisor will ensure that these divergencies are overcome in collecting information of skills and training needs.

The basis for these processes is that there should be an individual record form which should contain the following:

Personal record

- Formal qualifications (award or credentials)
- Other formal training including in-service
- On the job instruction/training
- Relevant other courses/training

- Readily identifiable other 'skills'
  - other languages (including literacy and fluency)
  - keyboard speeds
  - knowledge of and competence in office hardware, software

Work history

- Positions held, including substantial relevant unpaid ones, with brief outline of *when*, *where* and *what* the work entailed. There should be clear instructions to include *community work* and where relevant, particular *interests* which may have family and household aspects, e.g. a family with a disabled person trains its members in disability issues.

Content knowledge

- Areas of expertise relating to previous employment or non-paid activities which provide content-based skills with possible relevance, for example:
  - familiarity with legislative provisions
  - industrial relations skills
  - understanding of food labelling
  - local government planning laws for child-care centres
  - Anti-discrimination procedures
  - Family Law provisions regarding maintenance
  - Justice of the Peace
  - steel processing
  - carpentry
  - cleaning

These tend to be adequately defined as they are conventionally assumed to be work skills. The main problem is those which are gathered outside paid work which tend to be overlooked.

Process skills

These are more fully outlined above, so this section just includes the headings. These are the skills which tend to be overlooked and require some careful attention if the worker is to acknowledge that these are skills. Therefore a checklist could be used to illustrate the possibilities.

mediation

negotiation

- . implementing
- . planning
- . training

persuading

sorting priorities

developing systems

communicating

information brokerage

creating a comfortable environment

group processes

counselling

recognising significant events

providing personal support

The above material should be in addition to the conventional material collected. Its inclusion will allow supervisors to understand why some work groups are more comfortable and productive than others. It will also allow for better selection which moves from the easily measured to the difficult but essential qualities of a good worker.

TRYING IT OUT

Identifying skills

Remembering the scenarios at the beginning of this monograph, and the material you have since looked at, you have some arguments for changes in both the evaluation of skills and the training processes which are recognised as legitimate. This section puts forward various means we have developed to help people assess both their own skills, and the ways in which jobs could be and should be described.

Now think about:

- How adequate are the job descriptions you work with?
- How gendered are the skill definitions and their valuing?
- Is there a public/private split between those things that are formally taught and those learned through informal interaction?

This section offers you the opportunity to find the limits of your own perceptions. This will then give you the ability to determine the personal aspects of the critique.

1. Each person should use the process of skill audit to look at the SKILLS they use in the household and unpaid work and how these can be equated with workplace skills.
2. This process could then be adapted for use in the workplace for personnel record, job application forms, career planning and possible training needs assessments.

Household and family care skills

This section starts from the other end. By looking at household skills, it seeks to provide a framework for allowing people who think they have no skills to understand that they do. Then they can develop an ability to articulate their skills and advocate for them to be recognised. This recognises that the industrial

relations area moves slowly and the push often has to come from the workers, rather than allowing for systems change from above.

Working in the home, organising a household involves SKILLS, including those which we acquire in our childhood. Because of the way we learn these tasks we are likely to discount them, especially if we see learning as something that is book-based that we get from school, rather than something we get by watching, copying and doing. In this idea of what learning is, we are mimicking some very recent and limited assumptions about knowledge. After all, until only a century ago when school became compulsory, literacy was not a general thing in Australia.

So let us look at the site of the more traditional skill acquisitions: homes and community settings. Try and remember what your Gran showed you, what you learned from your mother, and often what you taught yourself by trying out and experimenting till you got it right:

Can you knit?

Can you crochet?

Can you knock a nail in straight?

Do plants die under your care or flourish?

Can you change a fuse?

Can you hot wire a car?

• Look at FOOD PREPARATION. We all have to do some of it and we often develop real skills.

- Are your sandwiches neat?
- Do you invent new things to put together?
- Can you do almost anything with mince?
- Can you stretch a little bit of food to satisfy a lot of people?

•Can you find the bargains in the supermarket and know which ones are the cheapest?

•Can you

- slice meat neatly?
- peel a potato without too much loss?
- chop onions into rings?
- crack eggs leaving the yolks whole?
- plan and organise a birthday party for ten kids?
- make a mean curry with left overs?
- create soups out of bits and pieces?
- plan the shopping so you don't run out?
- make a really special hot chocolate?
- ice a cake so it looks good?
- make good anzac biscuits?

- have a fun cooking session with little kids?
- teach your kids to prepare a decent meal?
- put on a really classy meal occasionally?
- enjoy cooking for a crowd of visitors?
- easily work out alternative ingredients when you run out?
- Do you have a couple of really good recipes that you enjoy making?

• What about CLEANING THE HOUSE. Can you
- make a house look really tidy?
- enjoy hanging out a really clean wash?
- iron even complex clothes well?
- put things away?
- organise things and find what you are looking for?

• And in the LAUNDRY, can you
- handwash carefully old and delicate clothes?
- get out stains?
- make jumpers keep their shape?

• Can you fix things like
- change a fuse?
- put up shelves?

• Can you deal with MECHANICAL EMERGENCIES like
- change a wheel?
- change a fanbelt?

• And in the GARDEN, can you
- grow vegies?
- grow flowers?
- grow a good lawn and keep it trim?
- start a garden from scratch?
- rescue a garden that has been neglected?

• How about CARING FOR KIDS, can you
- read to kids?
- show them how to make a scrapbook?
- draw pictures for them ?
- tell them stories?
- make up stories?
- make clothes for them?

- alter clothes?
- make them dress ups?
- play games with them?
- teach them songs and singing games?
- teach them words and numbers?
- take care of them when sick?
- explain things to them?
- give them lots of cuddles?
- teach them about their bodies?
- teach them to be clean?

• Do family members SEEK YOUR HELP?
- When?
- For what?

Now for each of the ticks above:

• List the PEOPLE SKILLS it required
- persuading
- reassuring
- listening
- giving information
- training
- any others?

• List the MANUAL SKILLS you used
- What tools did you use?
- Are you neat?
- How are the fiddly bits?

• Work out which ones required some CREATIVE THINKING

• Tally the ones that needed PROPER PLANNING

• Now COUNT UP all the skills you use at home.

Tasks and skills used for community activities (unpaid voluntary work)

When we apply for paid jobs we often assume that the only experiences we can use are those from other paid jobs or formal training courses. We often ignore the many community activities we take part in and rarely assume that the home-based tasks transfer into paid work.

For many women time out of the paid workforce is described on paper as 'doing nothing' or 'just a housewife,' yet a little more probing often reveals that the person ran and organised many community activities, as well as a household. For the purpose of this exercise we want you to think about those activities you do outside the house, or those you do for people other than close family members.

The following form is designed as a record of your activities in the community. Estimates suggest that time spent doing unpaid work may almost equal time spent in paid work. This suggests that much of what is done as unpaid work is essential, valued and productive, yet women often underrate their contributions and fail to record them as part of a description of their work experience.

Working your way through this form will help you organise a record of your unpaid work experiences. Then you can assess whether the things you have done will be useful to you in looking for paid work, or as a way of deciding what training you might like to do.

Part One
Organisations you have worked in

A.Children

Thinking about those activities you have become involved in through your children, circle the organisations you have taken part in:

- **Little children's**
  - Nursing Mothers, pre-school, child-care centre, playgroup, babysitting club , childbirth education, others ...
- **School children's**
  - P&C Parents and Friends groups at the school, school canteen, Scouts/Guides/ Cubs/Brownies, others ...
- **Sport for children**
  - Little athletics, gym, swim, football, netball, teamgames, others ...
- **Any others**

B. Community activities

Thinking about Community activities you may have been involved in, circle any of these below:

- **Environmental groups**
  - World Wildlife Fund, local environmental committees, recycling, tree planting ...
- **Local government**
  - Political parties
- **Unions**

- **Lobby groups**
- **Service to the community**
  - Hospital, community centre, refuges, telephone and other counselling services, information and referral, meals on wheels, day centres, visiting, other ...

C. Personal Interests

Thinking about your own interests, which of the following have you been involved in?

- **Hobbies and clubs**
  - Horticulture, bookreadings, other ...
- **Adult sports groups**
  - Tennis, aerobics, football, cricket, golf, bowls, other ...
- **Cultural organisations**
  - Ballet, dancing, musical, choir, bands, arts and crafts, painting, drawing, art gallery, museum, theatre, drama group, other ...
- **Service or social clubs**
  - Rotary, Toastmistresses, Ethnic, VIEW, RSL, other ....
- **Religious clubs**
  - Church groups, Sunday school teacher, fundraising , bible study, other ...
- **Change groups**
  - Women's Groups, Amnesty, personal growth, other...
- **Professional groups**
  - Computer groups, Law Society, AMA, Occupational Therapy Associations, other ...
- **Any others**

Count your ticks

Part Two
Have you ?...

This section is designed to help you recognise and transfer the activities you have been involved in into recognisable skills. **For each organisation or group you have circled in the previous section place a tick next to the corresponding activity listed below that you have been involved in. At the end of this you can make a tally for each activity you reviewed.**

a. Organised and run meetings
b. Managed projects or events
c. Negotiated contracts
d. Drafted budgets
e. Coordinated volunteers

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f. Planned strategy
g. Written proposals
h. Counselled people
i. Trained volunteers
j. Educated volunteers, the public
k. Referred clients to other services or centres
l. Motivated volunteers
m. Handled correspondence
n. Sold tickets or items
o. Delivered products or services (i.e. meals on wheels)
p. Typed letters, reports, minutes of meetings
q. Used a word processor or computer
r. Answered telephones
s. Solicited volunteers or contributions
t. Stuffed envelopes
u. Designed a logo or written promotional materials
v. Made posters
w. Photographed people at events
x. Used a video camera
y. Written press releases/announcements
z. Handled press interviews
i. Written media releases
ii. Recorded announcements for radio or television
iii. Managed books
iv. Planned the budget for an event
v. Managed petty cash

So now to find out what kinds of skills you have been using. Look at each of the activities you have a tick against and work out what section they fit into in the list below.

- **Managerial, administrative**
- **Practical**
    a. Organised and run meetings
    b. Managed projects or events
    c. Coordinated volunteers program
    d. Implemented plans for project/service

- **Written**
  - e. Wrote submission for project
  - f. Wrote official letters
  - g. Wrote notices
  - h. Wrote reports
- **Counselling and human resources**
  - i. Counselled people
  - j. Trained volunteers
  - k. Referred clients to other services or centres
  - l. Motivated people to do things
  - m. Provided support and listening ear
  - n. Answered telephones
- **Recruiting**
  - o. Solicited volunteers or contributions
- **Support staff secretarial**
  - p. Sold tickets or items
  - q. Typed up material
  - r. Used a word processor or computer
  - s. Write letters
  - t. Do mailouts
  - u. Take minutes
- **Marketing, selling, promotion**
  - v. Designed a logo or written promotional materials
  - w. Made posters
  - x. Photographed people at events
- **Public relations and lobbying**
  - y. Used a video camera
  - z.Handled press interviews
  - i. Written media releases
  - ii. Recorded announcements for radio or television
- **Accounting, financial services**
  - iii. Managed books
  - iv. Planned the budget for an event
  - v. Managed petty cash

Interpersonal

Here are some other skills you might have, tick them if you have used these in the community or extensively at home:

- **mediation**
- **negotiation**
- **organising events**
  - running informal meetings
- **conflict resolution**
  - formal
  - informal
  - invisible
- **counselling**
  - informal
- **operating networks**
  - formal
  - informal
- **implementing**
  - planning
  - following up
  - allocating tasks
- **training**
  - formal
  - on the job
  - informal
- **persuading**
  - developing a case
  - creating agreement
- **nurturing**
  - young people
  - people in crisis
- **crisis management**
  - fighting fires
  - creating calm
- **making a friendly ambience**
  - welcoming people

- seeing to needs
- recognising significant events
- providing personal support

• sorting priorities
- time
- resources
- tasks
- attention

• developing systems
- classifying
- organising
- documenting

Now go back to looking at your resume/cv/job application. Put in all those areas you have ticked and use the list to remind you that these are all useful skills.

CONCLUSION

The material in this monograph is designed to raise issues relating to skill definition. While it is recognised that there are few options for fundamental change, there are possibilities for ensuring that women can benefit rather than lose by the processes under way in assisting women re-entering the workforce to present themselves effectively.

There is a need to look at redefining workplace skills so that those that are necessary for workplaces to work effectively and which are home-learned, are acknowledged as skills and valued appropriately. The women whose home skills do approximate workplace skills will also need to acknowledge that other skills they use are also workplace valued. In the meantime, we can continue to attempt to push the bounds of the present system so that women can appropriately record and own the skills they have that are appropriate to the limited present definitions.

What is clear is that women need to be given the opportunity to develop a sense of their own skills, both within the current parameters and in seeking for new boundaries. Unless the women themselves can act as effective advocates on their own behalf, it is unlikely that the present system will yield much change. The present enterprise bargaining awards and industrial relations club dominance would militate against any major moves towards redefining the agreed skill bases.

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Eva Cox involves herself in many social and political issues. She has worked for government and voluntary organisations in Australia and has been an active and irrepressible advocate for feminist views of social policy. She was born in Vienna in 1938, a fortnight before the Nazis took over and has been biased ever since. She has worked as a senior policy advisor in both the federal and New South Wales spheres, and is currently co-director of Distaff Associates, a consultancy in which commercial research and training pay and support social change activities. Her interest in the area of women and skills was sparked by her observation when training senior women managers that they have the same difficulties identifying their informally acquired skills as women not in the paid workforce.

Helen Leonard left the paid workforce in 1972 to have children and did not re-enter until the end of the 1980s. In the intervening years she held a number of positions in the Nursing Mothers' Association of Australia. These ranged from breastfeeding counsellor and local group leader to National Vice President and member of the Board of Directors for nine years. She also initiated ongoing national campaigns such as National Mothering Week and Breastfeeding Awareness Month and wrote and edited national magazines. In her local community, she was instrumental in establishing consumer advocacy and support systems. Despite the informal education and experience gained in these years, she had great difficulty in identifying, naming and especially owning the skills she had acquired, and then transferring them to the paid workplace. Her first full-time paid job, as co-director of Distaff Associates in the early 1990s, led to this research.

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